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Topic (iv) Balancing work and family responsibilities

**Good Practices for Mainstreaming Gender  
in the Production of Labour Statistics**

Submitted by ILO<sup>1</sup>

**Invited paper**

**Introduction**

It is widely accepted that men and women often do very different types of jobs and do not necessarily behave in the same way in the labour market. Quantifying these differences, and the factors that may lead to them, as well as how they evolve in time, is important as objective basis for designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes that promote equality between women and men in the labour market.

There is sufficient evidence, for example, to affirm that:

- Women generally participate less in the labour market than men and their age affects this participation differently from men's. (Age is linked with the reproductive cycle and the associated family responsibilities).
- In countries where agriculture is not very important, employed women tend to be concentrated in service occupations while employed men are more evenly distributed between industry and services. In countries where agriculture is widespread, women tend to be the bulk of contributing family workers.
- The share of women among those working in the informal sector is higher than their share in the total labour force.
- When only market work is considered, women tend to work shorter hours than men, and are more frequently in atypical forms of employment.
- Unemployment rates of women are higher than men's in most countries.
- Women are underrepresented in managerial, production and transport occupations while they make up a large part of clerical and service occupations.
- Women earn less than men, even when they have the same level of educational attainment, working in the same occupations and hours of work.

This list of examples could be made longer, but the lack of relevant information often hinders deeper analysis. Furthermore, common under-reporting and misrepresentation of women's and men's contribution to the economy persist, and contributes to maintaining a distorted perception of the nature of a country's economy and its human resources, and thus perpetuating a vicious circle of inequality between men and women strengthened by inappropriate policies and programmes.

In order to identify those areas in labour statistics where there are gaps and shortcomings, it is important to know the characteristics that labour statistics need to have to be useful to reflect gender differences and similarities comprehensively. This paper argues that these relate to the **coverage, detail and presentation** of these statistics: (a) that good labour statistics need to be able to capture and describe all

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work situations with relevant detail; and (b) that, in order to understand the various constraints and needs that men and women face in their everyday life, affecting their commitment and availability to engage in paid work, it is essential that information about their work activities and conditions be presented together with explanatory information, including data on their personal and family situations. This in brief are the issues presented in this paper.

### **About why good labour statistics need to be made better and how**

National labour statisticians, often working in National Bureaus of Statistics or in Ministries of Labour, are responsible for producing statistics on the number and characteristics of persons and economic units participating in the labour market of their country<sup>2</sup>. The process of producing this vast range of data is influenced by economic theories that explain who the actors are in the labour market and how it functions, as well as by the limitations (including costs) of the methods of data collection available in the economy at a specific time. These factors all work out to determine the capacity of labour statistics to reflect the labour market. In particular, they take a toll on those groups of persons or economic units that, because of their characteristics or behaviour, do not fall neatly into the common view of what a “worker” or “enterprise” should be. As an illustration, it is easy to view a typical “worker” as a middle-aged man who works outside of his house. It is more difficult to perceive that the child who produces matches in her own home is also a worker. Similarly, a typical “enterprise” is a factory or office, with a clearly identifiable building. It is more difficult to perceive that an enterprise can be made up of one shoe-shine person working in the streets.

Many women, and also a number of men, are found in these “atypical” forms of employment, and tend to be ignored from concepts, measurements and standard presentations. Even when they are considered, their work situations tend to be described less well than more typical work situations. If they are not considered or not well described in national statistics, then policies will tend not to address their needs or address them insufficiently. In order to improve this situation, it is necessary to evaluate the data collection process from a gender perspective so that these work situations are recognized and properly included in statistics. However, this may only be possible if there is a change in the way reality is understood by those who design and implement the data collection programmes, may can go against prevalent social perceptions of roles and expectations. An additional effort therefore is needed and this translates itself into additional costs for statistical agencies. Even though the quality of their output will be improved, these may not see the point of incurring into these additional costs if there is no political will or pressure from doing so. Therefore, we argue that three things are essential to get the process started:

- (1) There should be political will to mainstream gender at all levels in the organisation planning and executing statistical data collection, backed up by evidence that introducing gender in statistics actually improves their quality;
- (2) A team of persons should be set up to identify the gender issues in all labour areas;
- (3) Awareness should be created by all persons having to do with the data collection exercise, ranging from the director of the statistical institute down to the interviewer - because the process of mainstreaming gender affects all stages of the data collection exercise.

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<sup>2</sup> Information about persons relates to those who are employed, unemployed and underemployed and their characteristics: their sex, age, education level, but also their occupations, their status in employment, their wages and income, the hours they work, the number, type and duration of occupational injuries and diseases they have suffered, the number and duration of strikes that have taken place, etc. Information about establishments relates to the number of economic units that employ workers, or are seeking to employ them, and their characteristics: their economic activity (or industry), the institutional sector they belong to, their demand for labour (vacancies) and the cost they incur by employing labour (labour cost). Consumer price indices have also been seen as part of labour statistics given their importance in determining minimum wages, although they do not refer to persons or establishments.

## **Coverage of topics**

The first characteristic of good labour statistics relates to adequate **coverage of topics**. It is important to have information on employment, unemployment and underemployment, which are part of most conventional statistical programmes, but it is also essential to have information on other topics which are rarely covered but where the differences between women's and men's situations are important and revealing: e.g., on the number of persons in the informal sector; child labour; as well as who "work" in an enlarged sense (i.e., including workers who produce goods and services for own consumption).

Conventional labour statistics often include information on workers' occupations, status in employment, incomes, working time, and occupational injuries. When presented at sufficient detail these are useful to show gender distinctions. Occupational information by sex is useful given that men and women generally do very different jobs. Status in employment by sex is also useful given that men and women do not participate equally in casual, temporary/seasonal employment, self-employment, etc. Statistics on employment related income are important given the pervasive differences between men and women in every country, even after correcting for their hours worked and level of education; data on working time will provide a more accurate measure of their participation in the labour market given that women tend to work fewer hours than men. Statistics on industrial disputes will indicate whether women tend to be indirectly rather than directly implicated in industrial action and whether they are in industries that are less prone to industrial disputes. And statistics on occupational injuries will be useful to illustrate the tendency of men to be in occupations where accidents are more visible and obvious.

There are related topics, however, which are rarely collected, which are essential to indicate the degree to which men and women differ or resemble each other in important areas of work. These include statistics on working time arrangements, absence from work, existence of care facilities, incidence of occupational diseases, home-based work, union participation, duration of employment, unemployment and underemployment, access to productive resources and allocation of benefits among household members. Statistics on working time arrangements would portray differences in what is known as Aregular full-time@ working schedules or in more irregular schedules, such as shift work, part-time employment, annualised working hours and other variable time schedules. Statistics on absence from work would indicate any differences in the types, frequency and duration of absences experienced by men and women, in particular in view of their family context; statistics on care facilities and how they affect working life would throw light on men's and women's family constraints. And statistics on occupational diseases would indicate whether women tend to be more exposed to such diseases than men.

## **Coverage of work situations**

Measuring relevant topics, however, is not enough. The statistics for these topics need to be produced in a way that is useful to portray differences and similarities between men and women. The coverage of workers and work situations is vital in this respect. Two factors determine this coverage: the definition used and the data collection instrument. The definition of a concept determines what is to be covered and with how much detail a topic will be described. The whole data production process is based on these definitions, and therefore the quality of the resulting figures depends on how well these definitions reflect the actual situations of the different participants in the labour market. A change in definitions will bring forth a change in the resulting statistics that may be unrelated to any change in the underlying reality. Measurement methodologies also play a role in allowing or hindering worker coverage, because they determine the type and range of information that can be obtained or presented with satisfactory reliability and precision.

To be useful for gender distinctions, definitions should recognise that women and men do not necessarily perform the same activities, nor do they always behave in the same way, nor are they subject to the same constraints. The definitions need to cover all relevant work situations, regardless of whether they are performed by a man or a woman, and need to distinguish the different work situations in sufficient detail to bring out gender distinctions. This, in practice, is difficult to achieve, as will be illustrated in the next paragraphs.

One important illustration of the effect of a definition on the resulting statistics is provided by the production boundary used to measure national production as well as labour statistics. All labour statistics are regulated by this boundary, e.g., employment only includes persons who perform “economic” activities and occupational injuries only cover persons experiencing an injury when performing “economic” activities. But what is considered as “economic” is based, not on the usefulness of the activity to society, but mainly on its marketability. Thus, most productive but unpaid activities are outside the scope of “economic” activities, such as housework and childcare, and thus not recorded in regular labour statistics. An area where such restricted coverage dramatically affects the capacity of labour statistics to reflect reality relates to child labour. Statistics on child labour will commonly exclude those children, mostly girls, who are engaged in unpaid household activities, even if this means that they are hindered to the same degree as children engaged in paid work from going to school, and consequently, programmes to combat child labour may not address their plight.

Another illustration of the effect of definition criteria on worker coverage is provided by the use of criteria that exclude certain groups of persons from a concept. Because the sex composition of these excluded groups is generally not even, the usefulness of the resulting statistics for reflecting gender differences will be reduced. Most of the time such exclusions affect women more than men, but not always. Employment figures that exclude the armed forces are affecting the balance between men and women to the detriment of men. Those that include high shares of persons on extended leave are reporting inflated employment levels for women. Income statistics are often partial because they to exclude social security benefits, profit-related pay and irregular payments, and self-employment income altogether, where differences between men and women may be important. Statistics on industrial disputes may also be incomplete when they cover only legal disputes, when they impose a minimum duration or a minimum number of workers involved or when they cover only workers “directly” involved, excluding workers who do not take part in the action but who work in the establishments concerned but are prevented from working. There as well, differences between men and women may be important.

A third illustration is provided by the use of short reference periods. Complete coverage of work situations should guarantee that seasonal and occasional activities are included in labour statistics, where women more than men are particularly represented. Only when long reference periods are used for measurement can this full coverage be guaranteed, but generally, national measures are based on short reference periods.

Measurement methodologies have also an important impact on the coverage of workers and work situations. Rarely do records kept by establishments or administrative agencies cover the whole population, and the groups excluded are generally those where women, more than men, are numerous, thus reducing the usefulness of these sources to reflect gender distinctions. Establishment-based surveys tend to cover only regular employees who work in medium sized and large establishments. They may leave out managerial staff as well as peripheral workers, such as out workers, part-time worker, casual employees and workers contracted from agencies. Similarly, administrative records will only cover persons concerned by the work of the agencies which keep them. In many countries, this coverage is very low relative to the total employed population, limited to regular full-time employees in the formal sector and excluding self-employed workers, casual and seasonal employees, outworkers and sometimes also part-time workers. Many women, and also men, tend to be very important in the groups of workers excluded, and so administrative records cannot fully reflect their characteristics and contribution in the economy. Only household-based surveys, which obtain information from the workers themselves through replies to a standard questionnaire, can cover the whole population, including the self-employed, casual workers, unpaid family workers, out workers and paid workers in small production units. Additionally, they are able to cover a much larger range of subjects than the other types of sources, because the subjects that can be covered are limited only by the capacity of household members to provide the information from their own knowledge. Given the above, household surveys are often considered the best source for statistics to reflect gender concerns.

## **Detail**

For definitions to be useful for gender concerns they need to make sure that men=s and women=s characteristics are described at sufficiently detailed levels to allow significant distinctions to emerge. To

detect gender differences and similarities in occupations, for example, a national classification of occupations needs to be used at a detailed level. To use only broad occupational groups will hide occupational segregation between men and women: analysing the managerial group as a whole, for example, will not reveal the fact that in many countries women tend to be concentrated in managing small enterprises, while most of those managing larger companies are men.

Similarly, to detect gender differences in workers' status in employment, it is not enough to distinguish between "employees", "employers" and "own account workers", as most countries do. These are very heterogeneous categories, each comprising diverse employment situations, where women and men tend to be unequally represented. For example, the category "employees" includes not only regular employees but also outworkers and casual employees and the "self-employed workers" include, in addition to employers and core own account workers, subsistence workers, share croppers and members of producers cooperatives.

To detect gender differences in income statistics, it is necessary to separately identify the various components of income because women and men may not accrue them to the same extent. Income statistics that include social security benefits and self-employment income will probably show a greater disparity between men and women than statistics which do not, because benefits relating to dependents plus the income generated by contributing family members are attributed to the main earners of the household, who tend to be men.

Another aspect relating to the level of detail in the statistics relates to the need for women workers' characteristics to be described equally well and with the same level of detail as the characteristics of men workers. For example, as much as possible, occupational groups at each level of a national classification of occupations should be identified separately to the same extent according to the criteria specified. Most national classifications tend to bulk in a few occupational groups the type of jobs dominated by women (clerical, agricultural and elementary occupations), while jobs where men are numerous (industrial) tend to be distinguished at detailed levels in the classifications.

### **Presentation of statistics**

A final characteristic of good gender statistics related to the way statistics are presented. Tables and figures should portray differences in men's and women's contributions, conditions and constraints. This implies relevant disaggregation by variables which describe the demographic, economic, social and family context of workers. This means, to begin with, that all labour statistics should make it possible to compare men with women. Establishments' registrations and other administrative records, as well as household based surveys, should as a minimum include information on the sex of persons. Evidently, the statistical system should always publish statistics disaggregated by sex.

But classification by sex is not enough. Statistics on the characteristics of workers should be disaggregated by those variables which, in addition to sex, help describe the differences or similarities between men and women. For example, statistics on income should be presented by workers' occupations, hours of work and level of educational attainment, three factors which affect the level of total income earned. Similarly, men's and women's occupational injuries, statistics should be presented by occupation, hours of work and seniority.

Most important of all, labour statistics should be disaggregated by variables which reflect the workers' personal and family situation, to explain the labour force participation and behaviour of women as compared to men in a more holistic way. Variables related to men's and women's personal and family circumstances include their age, their level of education, whether there are children in the household who need care, whether there are adults requiring assistance in the household (e.g., handicapped persons, older members of the family), etc. All these factors constrain in different ways the time and energy which women and men can dedicate to "economic" work.

### **Conclusions**

This article presents some characteristics of labour statistics which are needed for them to usefully address gender concerns. These can be resumed in the following four statements:

1. A political will exists at all levels in the data collection agency to incorporate gender concerns in the production of labour statistics.
2. Labour statistics ensure that, as far as resources allow, all relevant topics that address gender concerns are measured.
3. Labour statistics programmes are designed to ensure that definitions and measurement methods cover all workers and work situations at sufficient details to allow relevant gender comparisons to be made.
4. Labour statistics are presented in a way that will clearly describe gender issues in the labour market. This can be done by (i) presenting relevant topics in sufficient and relevant detail, (ii) linking statistics with explanatory variables, including workers' personal and family circumstances.

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